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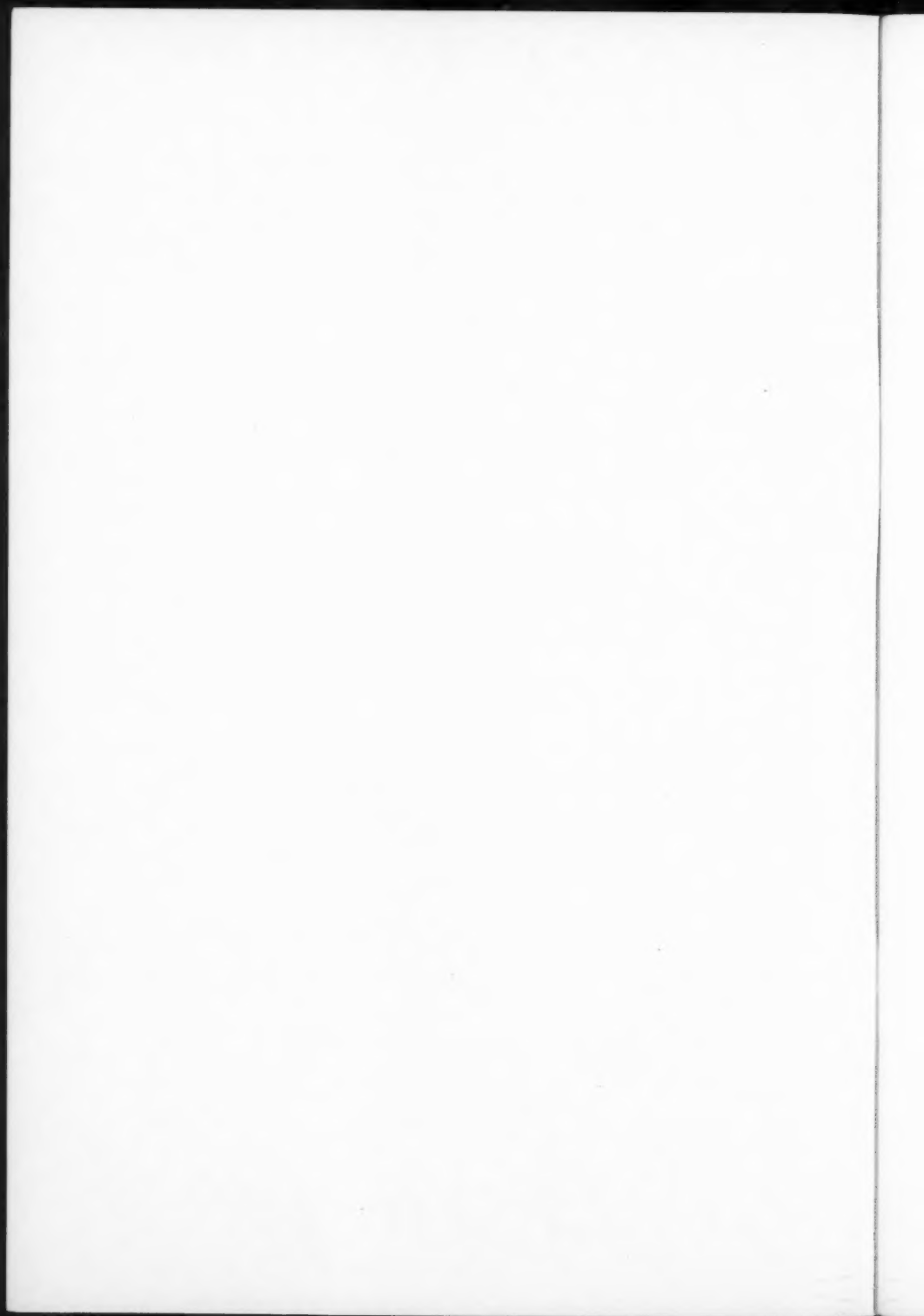
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EARLY DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL ON THE PUEBLO KACHINA CULT*

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It has often been remarked as a curious fact that there are so few statements in the accounts of the early Spanish explorers and settlers of New Mexico which may be taken as referring to any aspect of the kachina cult, or which, indeed, refer to the details of any ceremonial. Bandelier explained the Spaniards' inattention to these details on the ground that they saw nothing that they were not used to in Mexico, and what they did see was less spectacular.

"Nevertheless, there was one class [of dances] which became soon very prominent in the eyes especially of the clergy and to which great attention was paid, . . . owing to their signification and their practical bearing upon the religious and social life of the Indian. These dances have been handed down to us under the common designation of 'Ca-chi-nas'.

"The Cachina, as the name of a particular class of idolatrous dances, appears in the middle of the seventeenth century. The dance was early prohibited, but was never completely suppressed. . . . One of the first things the Pueblos did after the expulsion of Otermín from New Mexico was to re-establish the Cachinas."¹

The earliest statement of significance in this connection is that of Luxán, chronicler of the Espejo expedition of 1582, who

* The accompanying paper is a portion of a doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of New Mexico in June, 1951. The writer expresses his gratitude to Dr. France V. Scholes and Dr. W. W. Hill for their advice and assistance in the collection of this material.

¹ Bandelier, Adolph F., "Final Report of Investigations among the Indians of the Southwestern United States," part 1, *Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America*, American Series, vol. 3 (1890), 150-51 and fn.

said, in referring (according to the editors) to the Tiwa pueblos, "Throughout this nation they have many masks which they use in their dances and ceremonies."² For some obscure reason, Parsons belittled this statement, asserting that it is vague and that Luxán probably never saw any of the masks, since the people fled upon the approach of the Spaniards. Also, she said that, considering the date, it possibly reflects the spread of Spanish masks, and pointed out that none of the other chroniclers mentions them.³ Beals and White have taken issue with her on this point, and I think with justice. Beals says, "Luxán's diary is apparently quite accurate, and this statement must be accepted at its face value. Certainly there is nothing equivocal about it. The expedition of Espejo was organized primarily to rescue the friars left by Coronado in the Pueblo country and was the second expedition to visit the Southwest. The only Spanish source for the masks would have been the Coronado expedition, and it is hard to imagine this hardboiled treasure-hunting party introducing masks, or their having had time to become as integrated in the culture as the Luxán statement implies. In fact, if the masks were of Spanish character, Luxán would probably have noticed it as a curiosity." Beals accepts Bandelier's explanation, that masks were not mentioned by others because already familiar in Mexico. "The Spaniards, as anyone who has read the early accounts has discovered to his exasperation, rarely mentioned anything which was the same or similar to Mexican customs."⁴

Our next source, in point of time, and richer in the present connection than all others combined, is the *Proceso contra Mendizábal*, a series of documents dating from the early 1660's,

² Hammond, George Peter, and Rey, Agapito, "Expedition into New Mexico made by Antonio de Espejo, 1582-83, as revealed in the Journal of Diego Perez de Luxán," *Quivira Society Publications*, 1 (1929), 79.

³ Parsons, Elsie Clews, "Some Aztec and Pueblo Parallels," *American Anthropologist*, new series, 35 (1933), 612; *Pueblo Indian Religion*, Chicago, 1939, 1070-71.

⁴ Beals, Ralph L., "Masks in the Southwest," *American Anthropologist*, new series, 34 (1932), 168. See also White, Leslie A., "Masks in the Southwest," *American Anthropologist*, new series, 36 (1934), 626-8.

being an account of the prolonged trial for heresy, malfeasance in office, etc., before the Inquisition, of the former Governor Bernardo Lopez de Mendizábal, one of the principal charges against him being that he encouraged the Indians to dance the "catzinas" which had been forbidden by the friars.⁵

Before passing to the details recorded in the *Proceso* it may be useful to list here the towns which are mentioned in it as having danced the "catzinas", with their tribal affiliations:

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Towns</i>
Piro (Tanoan—Rio Grande valley and east, south of the Southern Tiwa)	Alamillo
Southern Tiwa	Isleta Alameda Sandia
Eastern Tiwa (east of the Manzano Mountains)	Quarai Tajique
Eastern Keres	Santa Ana Cochiti
Tano (Tanoan—south of Santa Fé in the Galisteo basin)	Galisteo San Cristóbal San Lazaro San Marcos
Tewa	San Juan San Ildefonso Tesuque Pojoaque

The list is probably not exhaustive, since a number of other towns no doubt had similar customs, but they are not specifically

⁵ *Proceso contra Mendizábal*, Archivo General de la Nación, México, Inquisición, vols. 587, 593, 594 (ms.). Many of the significant passages have been translated and published in Bandelier, Adolph F. and Fanny R., *Historical Documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Viscaya, and Approaches thereto, to 1773* (edited by Charles Wilson Hackett), Carnegie Institution of Washington, publication no. 330, vol. 3 (1937), to which I shall refer in such cases.

mentioned in this source.⁶ Others are, however, mentioned elsewhere, and they may be given here, as follows: Chililí (Eastern Tiwa), Socorro (Piro), San Felipe (Piro or Eastern Keres, or perhaps both are referred to), Puaray (Southern Tiwa), and Jemez.⁷

In the declaration of Fray Nicolás de Chavez, it is stated that Mendizábal gave the Indians permission to perform the dance of the "catzinas", "which is a dance of the heathen in which the Indians dress themselves in peculiar garments, concealing only their private parts, smearing their entire bodies with earth, and covering their faces with masks like hoods, leaving only a small hole through which they can see a little. Only the men perform this dance, and when they dance it some of them beat the others with palm leaves over their entire bodies until they draw blood; they then go from house to house, entering them and bringing out with blows the Indian women, whom they carry away terrified and frightened to see those demoniac figures to certain rooms which they call *estufas*, which are underground. There the men and women have sexual intercourse in bestial fashion, fathers with daughters, brothers with sisters, and mothers with sons. When this deponent was passing through the pueblo of Pujuaque, . . . at about eleven o'clock at night, . . . [he] found that the Indians of Pujuaque were dancing the *catzinas* in the darkness of the night right in the plaza of the pueblo, which is very small. They were singing their songs in their own language, and were so drunken and so holden by the devil that when this deponent [spoke to them] and when the horses stumbled in passing over them, yet the Indians did not perceive it."⁸ It was reported by Fray García de San Francisco that Mendizábal had caused the *catzinas* to be danced in Santa Fé by neighboring Indians,⁹ and this was repeated by Fray Nicolás

⁶ *Proceso*, passim. See Hodge, Frederick W. (ed.), "Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico," *Bulletin of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 30, pts, 1-2 (1907-10), for further information on these pueblos.

⁷ Bandelier and Bandelier, op cit.; Twitchell, Ralph Emerson, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico*, 2 vols. Cedar Rapids, 1914; Hackett, Charles W., "Otermín's Attempt to Reconquer New Mexico, 1681-1682," *Old Santa Fé*, 3, no. 9 (1916); and see below.

⁸ Bandelier, and Bandelier, op. cit., 152. ⁹ *ibid.*, 156.

de Freitas, who stated that the dance took place "about the end of September or the beginning of October," 1660.¹⁰ This testimony is again given in the indictment,¹¹ but the fullest account is that of Mendizábal himself, in reply to the indictment:

"... the Indians of the pueblo of Tesuque came to the villa of Santa Fe and ... they asked permission to dance the *catzinas* ... They did so after this fashion: Ten or twelve Indians dressed themselves in the ordinary clothes which they commonly wear and put on masks painted with human figures of men; then half of them, with timbrels, such as are commonly used in New Spain, in their hands, went out to the plaza. The others carried thongs, or whips, in their hands. They placed in the middle of the plaza four or six watermelons. . . After putting the watermelons in the middle of the plaza, those who were dancing continued to do so noisily, sounding the timbrels crazily, as they are accustomed to do, and saying, 'Hu, hu, hu.' In this fashion they circled around the plaza and the other Indians with the thongs went along, leaping, watching the watermelons, or prizes, from a distance, and allowing opportunity for other youths and boys, Indians or others, to slip in and snatch the watermelons. The one who did so they chased, and if they caught him they gave him many blows with the thongs, but if they did not catch him, he, being more fleet of foot, carried off the watermelon without receiving any lashes. When several had thus run away the dance stopped, and it contained no other feature." He was told the words uttered by the participants meant nothing.¹² In the testimony of Fray Nicolás de Freitas, it is reported "that the Indians of the pueblo of La Isleta had danced the *catzinas* on a high hill which is in sight of the pueblo." He went on to explain the reference: "the name was given by the Spaniards, who perhaps took it from some of the languages of the Indians of those provinces. . . It is to be observed that this dance includes two varieties, in the first of which occurs direct invocation of the devil, his false priests taking part in it; there is also a ritual of discipline and an offering to the devil of fruits of the earth. In the other variety there is less solemnity but much

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 158. ¹¹ *ibid.*, 209. ¹² *ibid.*, 223-4.

superstition; in it occur carnal intercourse of fathers with daughters, sons with mothers, and brothers with sisters, with no regard for relationship.

"... before performing the first variety of this dance, the Indians fast two or three days, and after the fast is ended comes the day of the dance, when the naked dancers put on their faces a kind of hood or mask, with a small hole through which they can see a little; these masks are made of cloth or buckskin; and they also put on other masks, dyed black. Those who wear these are the most idolatrous. Before they come out in public they practice in their underground council chambers, and when they come out in public one of them puts the offering of the things mentioned in the place where the dance is to be performed. The other dancers perform the dance around the offering. The language used is a tongue not understood, even by the Indians themselves, or at least they are unwilling to say more than that it is the language of the devil. If they are asked for what purpose they perform these dances, they say that it is to obtain the woman they desire, and that the devil will give her to them, or, that he will give them corn, or any other particular thing they request. One or more of them seize small palm leaves, and cruelly beat until they bleed one or more of the dancers who desire to make that sort of blood sacrifice to the devil; they all become so frenzied that they seem to be beside themselves without having previously taken any liquor whatever which might intoxicate them. Sometimes they leave this dance and enter any house which they care to, and enjoy the woman who seems pleasing to them.

"In the second variety of this dance there is no fast, though there is sometimes a ritual of discipline in the form indicated, always with the masks on. They perform the dance, singing in that unknown tongue, and, having danced, go to whatever house they desire, and have carnal intercourse with women as closely related as has been said."¹³ Freitas also reported that this "had also been danced in the pueblo of San Miguel de Taxique in Las Salinas."¹⁴ The dance is said to have been performed also

¹³ *ibid.*, 157-8, and also in the indictment, 207-8. ¹⁴ *ibid.*, 159.

by the "heathen Apaches", but under circumstances suggesting a marriage ceremony.¹⁵ We are led to suspect from this reference to the "catzinas" that the term was rather loosely applied, and its precise meaning is not any too clear.

In a letter from Fray Salvador Guerra it is stated that at Isleta, the *catzinas* were "dressed to represent the devil." Their performance included songs and lashings, "costumes, masks, and such infernal singing that it was horrible to see them."¹⁶

A letter from Estebán Clemente, the native Indian governor of the pueblos of Las Salinas and Tanos, contains the following information, as digested in the indictment:

"Also in these *catzinas*, there are some who wear ugly painted masks. Certain Indians put them on, go to dance in them, and try to create the impression that they come from the other life to speak to the persons to whom they appear. In the dances in which the fast occurs, the one who fasts distributes feathers to those whom he superstitiously considers to be lucky, and, on the day upon which the *catzinas* are to be danced, he has the plaza of the pueblo swept. Then the one who has fasted goes toward the east, accompanied by those whom he has chosen, and there they beat him. One of them, in the character of an acolyte, places on the ground some feathers and flour, upon which the one who fasted stations himself. This same thing they do after going to the north, to the west, and to the south. They then take the faster to a cave to give him certain beverages. All this they do thinking . . . that they will achieve good fortune, and be brave. In other *catzinas* dances many Indians come out, wearing masks to dance in the costumes of men and women, none of them actually being a woman, but all men. For what purpose this is done is unknown. In other dances they worship an idol, each one offering him whatever he wishes to offer; they also erect an altar to him."¹⁷

In a letter of Fray Alonzo de Posada, it is stated that he was "told by a Spaniard that there had been [maintained] openly in this pueblo [Isleta] a council chamber or room below the ground, which was full of idols, offerings, masks, and other

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 161-2. ¹⁶ *ibid.*, 164. ¹⁷ *ibid.*, 208.

things of the kind which the Indians were accustomed to use in their heathenism, and that the same condition prevailed in the rest of the pueblos, or at least in most of them. [He ordered men to go] to this council chamber or temple, for such they say it appears to be, and to take away all the paraphernalia. Others were ordered to do the same in other pueblos, [and] I have heard that a great quantity of objects of this kind has been collected as a result."¹⁸ Another letter of Posada to the Inquisition, not included in the *Proceso*, reports upon this confiscation in greater detail, mentioning various types of images and offerings which were seized. Of greatest interest in the present connection is the total of more than 1600 masks found,¹⁹ which certainly indicates a very flourishing mask cult.

To return to the materials in the *Proceso*, Fray García de San Francisco stated that the *catzinas* were danced in Isleta, Cuaraç (Quarai), and San Ildefonso,²⁰ and Fray Antonio Tavares reported the rumor that one "Juan Luján went to dance the *catzinas* in the council chambers of the pueblo of San Juan."²¹

In the declaration of Thomé Dominguez, the deponent stated that until Mendizábal gave his permission, the *catzinas* "had never been seen before," and that "he had never seen them performed in his life [he was 36] because the religious had prohibited them as being evil, and always mentioned the *catzinas* when they spoke against the superstitions of the Indians." The dance witnessed by him at Isleta is described as follows: "The Indians went out wearing various evil costumes; one of them especially had an ugly costume, like a devil, with horns on the head, and a bear skin which he dangled by two fingers thrust through the eye-socket—a horrible thing. They sang something which sounded like 'Hu-hu-hu'. . . Along with the Indian who wore the horrible figure of the devil already mentioned were three others, who walked somewhat apart.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 166-7.

¹⁹ Posada, Fray Alonso de, "Letter to the Inquisition in Mexico City, Santo Domingo, Dec. 8, 1661," ms. in *Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico, Inquisición*, vol. 595.

²⁰ Bandelier and Bandelier, *op. cit.*, 177.

²¹ *ibid.*, 177.

"He [Dominguez] had been told by [a woman who had it from a mulatto boy of hers] that upon his [the boy's] arrival at this pueblo [Isleta] at night, in the month of January, . . . he had heard the singing of the dance of the *catzinas*; as he drew near he saw that the Indians were in a council chamber under ground, using all their ancient ceremonies, wearing their costumes, and dancing this dance, in which they were making their offerings to the devil."²² The deponent Dominguez also said "that the Indians who are the principal movers in the dances—the priests, as it were, of their idolatries and superstitions, who are commonly called the *catzinas*—talk with the devil before they put on the costumes in which they dance, and then come out into the field, where they make various offerings to him. After they have committed this evil, they come into the pueblo dancing and singing 'Hu-hu-hu', which, though it means nothing, they sing to dance by after they have performed the idolatry of making the offering; and as the devil appears to them when he speaks to them, it is his figure which they assume in the costume which they use in dancing the *catzinas*. So great is the fear which the people have of these Indian *catzinas* through their fear of the devil, that they do whatever the men tell them to do."²³ Another portion of Dominguez' testimony is reproduced in the indictment as follows: ". . . a certain person . . . entered an Indian council-chamber under the ground near the convent of La Isleta, where he saw . . . eleven figures, or diabolical masks, with which the Indians danced the *catzinas*, suspended in the manner in which, among Christians, the holy images are placed. Beneath one of these masks was the offering which these Indians are accustomed to make, it being a wreath of flowering grass, some feathers, and a sort of short petticoat marked with black, having a border ornamented with beads."²⁴

In the testimony of Fray Antonio de Ybargaray, the deponent states that the dance of the *catzinas* was the principal ceremony of the heathen Indians, and that the men who controlled it were much respected and held to be priests.²⁵

²² *ibid.*, 177-8. ²³ *ibid.*, 179.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 209, and for original statement, 179-80. ²⁵ *Proceso*, vol. 593.

Captain Juan Varela de Losada stated that the *catzinas* were being danced at Alameda on a day in December, 1660.²⁶

In the testimony of Captain Hernán Martín Serrano, it is stated that the *catzinas* were the form of idolatry held in greatest esteem and most often performed by the heathen Indians. When he chided the Indians of Galisteo for these practices, they replied that they put much faith in the dances for good harvests of everything they sowed. In the dances they asked for water, mantas, health, and everything they needed.²⁷

Fray Miguel de Noriega said that the masks used in the dances looked like the face of the devil, and that their purpose was to ask their false gods for water, corn, squashes, and other items of sustenance.²⁸

In the indictment against Mendizábal, it is stated that "on one of the many occasions upon which the *catzinas* were danced in the pueblo of La Isleta, the Indians brought out a child about four or five years old, using it as a sacrifice by beating it."²⁹ In the reply of Mendizábal to the indictment, he said that "the *doctrineros*, whenever they have need of an entire pueblo for the tasks connected with their gainful occupations, have the Indians dance it [in public. He knew] that it had been danced before, and that even the Spaniards danced it in the time when Don Luis de Rocas was governor."³⁰

"The accused does not know the particular features of the dance of the *catzinas*; . . . he judges that it must be the most popular dance of the Indians, because it is so noisy. Not only do the Indians participate in it, but others who are not Indians endeavor to win prizes.

"He said that the Indians of those provinces are of most diverse nations and tongues, and each one dances according to his custom; they do not all dance the *catzinas* generally."³¹

Mendizábal's lieutenant, Nicolás de Aguilar, was undergoing trial at the same time on much the same charges, and many of the documents used as evidence in one case were also used in

²⁶ *ibid.*, vol. 593. ²⁷ *ibid.*, vol. 593. ²⁸ *ibid.*, vol. 593.

²⁹ Bandelier and Bandelier, *op. cit.*, 209. ³⁰ *ibid.*, 221-2.

³¹ *ibid.*, 223.

the other. One such is the statement of Francisco de Valencia, who said that in October, "there came [to Quarai] an old Indian to notify the pueblo that the *catzinas* were coming, these being their heathen priests. The inhabitants of the pueblo went out, taking with them a *mestiza* who lived there, to receive the *catzinas*. One of the latter went shouting throughout the pueblo, saying that it was a long time since he had been exiled (pretending to be the devil) but they might be happy now, for he had come to be with them. He then gave to the *mestiza* a fir-branch which he carried in his hand, and she received it and put it in her house. The meaning of this ceremony I do not know. Then the *catzinas* went all around the pueblo shouting. They went and got earthen bowls, gourds, and other things, according to their superstitious custom."³²

Other statements were used only in the case against Aguilar. Fray Fernando de Velasco said that in Taxique and Chilili the Christian Indians were ordered by Aguilar to dance the *catzinas*. "Once when there was a great deal of snow the *catzinas* Indians went up to the flat roof of the very church and began to perform their superstitious dance very noisily."³³

Reports of the hearings of Aguilar himself include the following: "In that kingdom [New Mexico] the Indians were accustomed to perform a dance, which consisted of their coming to the plaza in very ugly masks, each one bringing in his hand some of the fruits which they eat, tied with a maguey cord, and depositing them one after another in a circle in the plaza. The Indians then put on masks representing aged persons and walk among the fruit, making ridiculous figures. Other Indians, either belonging to the place or strangers, come as freely as they wish. He who dares enter the circle to take the fruit, does so; he seizes what he wants, and flees. The Indians in the masks try to stop him and strike him with little paddles which they carry, whereupon those who are caught pay those who catch them, and so on until [the fruit is gone. When the father called upon the pueblo to clean the roofs and offices] some of the *catzinas* Indians went about notifying the people and strik-

³² *ibid.*, 137, also 178-80.

³³ *ibid.*, 132.

ing them with little paddles."³⁴ On one occasion, Fray Fernando de Velasco, at Taxique, ordered the masks to be brought to him. "Two masks were missing, one representing an old man and another an old woman," but these were brought and all were sent to the custodian, Fray Alonzo de Posada. Aguilar said no idols were carried in the dance, since Velasco would have asked for them, and he did not.³⁵

Among the papers concerning the suicide of Fray Miguel Sacristán is a letter of Fray Alonzo de Posada, dated Dec. 4, 1662, in which he states that he received a letter from Sacristán which said "he had collected all the masks from the pueblo of Los Emes [Jemez] . . . He came in, and the Indians who entered with him brought a number of masks and other things, including two figures like those of dragons, which the Indians used in their dances. I saw that the figures were very ugly indeed, and very much like the representations of the devil."³⁶

From the material presented above, the following rather impressive list of elements of the modern kachina cult seem traceable back to the mid-seventeenth century; masks "like hoods" used in dances, whipping by dancers, use of kivas by dancers, kachina races for food prizes, kachina calls, fasting before dances, masked figures as impersonators of the dead, offerings of prayer-feathers and meal, participation by men only, female impersonations, storage of masks in kiva, horned masks (?), dance kilts (?), dancing performed for all sorts of blessings (food, water, health, etc.), announcement of arrival of dancers, use of spruce (?), masked figures to bring together working parties, figures of water serpent (?), but (according to some accounts) no "idols".

In 1680 occurred the famous Pueblo Revolt, which drove all the Spaniards from New Mexico, and in 1681, Otermín attempted a reconquest which was unsuccessful, though he penetrated some distance up river. The accounts of the expedition contain some material pertinent to our topic. At Isleta, "The Indians were . . . ordered to take out of their houses and from any other place whatsoever, the idols, feathers, powders, masks, and every other

³⁴ *ibid.*, 141-2.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 145.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 231.

thing pertaining to their idolatry and superstition."³⁷ At Puaray, Mendoza, an officer of Otermín, "made a house to house search and found . . . a great many 'masks de cacherias [catzinas?], in imitation of the devil, which are those that they use in their diabolical dances.'"³⁸ At Sandia, Mendoza found that some cells of the monastery had been "employed as storerooms for masks, powdered herbs, feathers, and other things used by the Indians in their ceremonials and dances, particularly that of the Cacina."³⁹ At both San Felipe and Santo Domingo many masks were reported found.⁴⁰

A number of Indians were questioned by order of Otermín, and their statements contain some pertinent material. José, an apostate, said that after the Spaniards left, "throughout the entire kingdom the Cachina was danced, for that purpose having made many masks with the likeness of the devil."⁴¹ A Piro of Socorro said of the apostates "that he has seen them dance the Cachina and that he himself has danced it."⁴² Pedro Naranjo of San Felipe reported that the Indians had "rebuilt their houses of idolatry called estufas, making very ugly masks in imitation of the devil, in order to dance the Cachina dance."⁴³ Two other men of this vicinity gave the same report, mentioning the "dances of Cachina and Losé, which are dances instituted by the devil."⁴⁴

Following this time, for what reason I do not know, there seem to be no published reports giving material pertinent to our subject until 1852, the date of Ten Broeck's visit to the Hopi. Fewkes discovered this situation also, stating that previous to this, the dances had been known to exist, but knowledge was exceedingly fragmentary.⁴⁵ One unpublished source exists, however, dating from 1777, close to the middle of this one hundred and seventy-one year period (1681-1852). This is the report of Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez on his trip to New Mexico during which he was to visit all the missions then in existence.

³⁷ Hackett, op. cit., 56. ³⁸ *ibid.*, 63. ³⁹ *ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 67. ⁴¹ Twitchell, op. cit., II, 57.

⁴² *ibid.*, 61. ⁴³ *ibid.*, 64. ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁵ Fewkes, J. Walter, "Tusayan Katchinas," *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 19 (1900), pt. 2, 264; Marcy, Col. Randolph B., *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border*, New York, 1866, 105-8.

He made a number of observations which have some interest in the present connection, though none of a detailed character. He noted the use of kivas and their varying numbers in different towns, mentioning nine for Pecos, one for Nambé. Some were underground, some on the surface, round or square, but all were entered through a hatchway in the roof. They were used for councils and dance practice.

The dances, according to Dominguez, were like Spanish country dances. The participants bathed and the men decorated their bodies with earthen paints, from head to foot, wearing only a loin cloth. The painting might be with half of the body (vertically) of one color, the other half another color, or with opposite portions differently colored, in patches or sections. A tortoise-shell rattle was tied around one leg, with deer-hoof or sheep-hoof tinklers, or little bells, and these were also tied around other parts of the body. The women had red paint on the cheeks, were barefooted like the men, and let the hair hang loose. The men wore a little bunch of macaw feathers on their heads, the women having small tablitas with small feathers and yucca latticework. The dances might be by twelve or more men alone, or the same number of women, or eight men with eight women, or a couple only. The sole instrument was the double-headed drum played with a stick. The chant was accompanied by soft beating of the drum.⁴⁶

As can easily be seen, none of this refers specifically to kachina dances, which may be assumed to have been conducted secretly, but many of the details seem to have persisted until modern times in general Pueblo dance practice.

⁴⁶ Dominguez, Fray Francisco Atanasio, "Description of New Mexico," (1777), ms. in Biblioteca Nacional (México), Legajo 10, Número 43.

Dominguez' material is soon to appear in print. See Eleanor B. Adams and Fray Angelico Chavez, "The Missions of New Mexico, 1776: A description by Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and other contemporary documents." University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque. To be published 1955.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NORTHERN BASUKUMA'S IDEA OF THE SUPREME BEING

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I. INTRODUCTION

The religion of the northern Basukuma is composed almost entirely of a direct ritual relationship with the spirits of their ancestors. In addition there are non-ancestral spirits and the Supreme Being, who is the subject of this paper. For our purpose these spirits can be defined as supernatural agencies, not believed to be directly perceived by human senses and personified in their motivations but not in form. They do not serve as the subject of an organized cult nor of prominent beliefs and are conceived of as having powers entirely separate from that of the ancestors or of being superior to them under the general control of the Supreme Being.

The conception of the Supreme Being amongst the northern Basukuma is as varied and uncertain as with other Bantu peoples, but that is not to say that the individual has no knowledge or ideas on the subject. If the Basukuma had developed a written culture these ideas might have become formalized, but although this is not so with them, every individual of mature years can talk freely and intelligently on his beliefs, supporting his discourse with a number of colloquial phrases very illustrative of the ideas behind his thoughts.

In their ideas on the Supreme Being they have two basic concepts; firstly, that the Supreme Being is a solitary spirit and that the various names under which He is known are nothing more than different aspects or intentions, more in the nature of facets to his character. The other and more widespread concept considers the Supreme Being to be pre-eminent over a pantheon of

lesser spirits who deal with the different aspects of life concerning both human beings and the world in general. Possibly the second view is nearer to being accepted by the majority as these secondary spirits derive their powers from the Supreme Being and yet have rather prescribed roles. The Supreme Being is not so much the major power in an hierarchy of spiritual beings but a force upon which everything else is contingent. There seems to be no definition of his nature and such qualities as are attributed to him seemed to be inferred by inference and default rather than by direct analysis. He is not deemed to be responsible for maintaining the world nor is there any idea of the Supreme Being being present in any form in anyone.

The Supreme Being is probably the conception of the tribe as a whole, on to which have been grafted the deistic notions of the various migratory groups which have added themselves to the main body of the Basukuma over some hundreds of years; thus it is that the Spirit of the Lake (*Ngassa*) which, in this area is subordinate to the Supreme Being, becomes the Supreme Being himself in the lands of the Bakerewe and Bazinza. A Nsukuma informant expressed it that we Sukumas have many spirits to worship but one surpasses all others and is called *Seba* and it is this name which has grown great to us and to *Seba* there is no equal. In general the Supreme Being has a normal every-day utility, whereas the other spirits are abstracted for particular purposes.

An analysis of several hundred place-names explained through the folk tales of elders, showed very few to be connected with ancestor worship and none at all with the Supreme Being and the non-ancestral spirits.

The word God (*mungu* or *mulungu*) is thought to be unknown to the Basukuma except as an importation from outside through the medium of Kiswahili, the lingua franca of Tanganyika, and for this reason the use of the word 'God' carrying with it so many preconceived and debatable connotations because of missionary activity, has been abandoned as the correct translation for any of the Basukuma's religious vocabulary.

There is no one or nothing superior to the Supreme Being

(*seba*) and such ideas as they have of creation go no further back than to say that the Supreme Being brought about certain conditions under which man was able to develop into his present social form. There is very little idea that the Supreme Being created anything of his own deliberate volition and indeed he is a totally independent spirit largely indifferent to men's activities. They do not regard it as essential that everything must have, or indeed should have, a cause. The character of the Supreme Being is constant and does not change from good to bad or vice versa and this, to the majority of men, is thought to be primarily good. He is above the petty influences of men and only does what he himself wants. Their conception of theistic good seems to be negative rather than positive. The Supreme Being refrains from doing evil or good which is conceived of as good in a sense unknown to Christian thought.

Although the belief in a Supreme Being is universal, he is usually too superior to bother with any connection or concern with the activities of humans, and from this it follows that he is not interested in either good or bad in particular cases, although he is interested in the moral aspects of conduct rather in the abstract than the concrete. Possibly here the explanation is that the Supreme Being does not control nature and society but is nature as a whole, and from this develops the vague idea that he is interested in some way in actions which are not controlled by the normal rules of society. The Supreme Being is interested in maintaining the unity of nature rather than in the offence, except insofar as it is disruptive of this unity, from which it follows that he is thought to know unspoken thoughts and, for example, unpleasantness towards a sick man might be turned against the perpetrator. The Basukuma consider that death is necessary for the survival of the world and the Supreme Being's unconcern in and lack of action in failing to prevent death is an example of his inherent goodness and that the pain, sorrow and fear in the world in no way detract from this state. This is well illustrated by the two popular sayings that the Supreme Being was wrong to bring death, but he also did well as without death, we would have had no room to live

(*Seba akabichya kutwenkela lufu. Aliyo hangi uluni twali twaleka kucha nitwishita*) and that death to us is the clearing away by the Supreme being so that we may live well (*kucha kwise hingise iyo Seba akatulimilaga*).

The Supreme Being has no regular connection with the earth and there are no direct invocations to him or shrines in his honour, although his names from other aspects or as other spirits, may be used in propitiation ceremonies for angry ancestors and in everyday phrases. Neither he nor the non-ancestral spirits are ever invoked in tribal or clan situations and they do not appear to be in any way the guardians of the social order and only to a very limited extent concerned with ethics. Further there are no stories relating to their protection of the people during tribal migrations nor are they used in any attempts at interpreting present social situations. It is thought that the ideas behind the different facets to his character or the subordinate spirits were imposed by the people experiencing what they took to be the Supreme Being's activities and are not ipso facto a part of the Supreme Being's self-createdness. There is no one who has seen the Supreme Being either in present-day life among those who are unusually perceptive to spiritual activity nor in historical folk-lore, and he is only recognisable in his actions; however, there are some who have dreamed of him and who have been able to talk with him through that medium.

A report of such a dream was retold in the following words. "When I was sleeping the Supreme Being came and called me by name with a harsh voice. I answered at once and asked who was calling and he replied 'it is I, the Supreme Being' and that if I came outside my hut I should be astounded as many had heard his name and that he was in the earth, but they did not know where he lived. I got up and went outside my house and saw there a light, brighter than anything that I have seen in my life and I asked who it was turning the night into day contrary to nature. The Supreme Being told me to sit down on the ground and that he would tell me news of my brothers who were dead and no longer on the earth. I could see nothing at first until eventually, I could distinguish a white mass within

the light and I began to be afraid but he reassured me and I listened to his words. He told me that I should have money and cattle and that I should marry and that my first born would be a daughter who would be married to the chief of my land. When he had said this he went up and disappeared and I saw him no more."

Animals and insects are all under the general power of the Supreme Being as well as the weather and a good or bad day for harvesting would be described as "Today the Supreme Being has given us the opportunity to be happy and to tire ourselves out into falling asleep (*lelo Seba watutwimilaga tuyege, natulanoge tukalala*)" or "Today the Supreme Being has refused to help (*lelo Seba walemaga*)". There is still the idea of immobility as the main characteristic which is conceived by them as being good.

Below the Supreme Being and his inferior spirits or character aspects come the ancestor spirits who are subject both to the propitiation of their descendents and to the overall control of the Supreme Being. A bad event can occur because it is willed by the Supreme Being or by the ancestor spirits, and if the sufferer goes to a magician for the divination of his ills and a cure involving the propitiation of the ancestors has no effect, then it is known that he is ill through the agency of the Supreme Being. If that is the case there are no means of working for a recovery; the sufferer can beg but there is known to be no hope in begging as the Supreme Being has already made known his intentions, but should he ultimately recover from his sickness, it is a sign that the Supreme Being has decided that the illness should only be a warning.

The Supreme Being is concerned with the activities of the ancestor spirits because they are, relatively speaking, nearer to him than living man, the natural association of supernatural agencies, just as the instinctive interest of the living man is with his ancestors to whom he is related rather than with the Supreme Being and non-ancestral spirits on whom he has no automatic influence or community of interests.

The sick or troubled person deals with the spirits of his an-

cestors because they are essentially human and can be thought of as humans and to act in a human way with their jealousies and conceits and, being related, there is always the hope that they will automatically act in their descendant's favour. As this is the fundamental tenet of their spiritual life, the idea and possibility of the Supreme Being being of personal assistance to them is beyond the scope of their imagination.

The more astute magician would consider himself able to recognise cases of the Supreme Being's actions and would probably refuse to take such consultations on the grounds of the futility of intercession for diseases which to him, and probably to us as well, would usually appear to be already incurable. However, it is generally recognised that a man cannot be sick without the connivance of the Supreme Being, irrespective of the attitude of the ancestor spirits, and there is the definite idea that the ancestors may intercede on their descendants' behalf and, should a man have a prolonged illness before he died, it would be said that the Supreme Being cannot be beaten but that his ancestors were very strong (*Seba atadumaga kwiike ilisamva lyakwe lyali nanguzu*) and if he should recover, that the intentions of the ancestor spirits have been agreed to by the Supreme Being (*Isamva lyakwe lyela kuli Seba*).

There is never any direct thanksgiving to the Supreme Being for recovery from illness or for material benefits received as the good result is nearly always regarded as being due to the intercession of the ancestor spirits to whom the thanks are due, although there is never any question of the ancestor spirits being dominant, as if that were so the Basukuma admit that there would be no death. The Supreme Being also controls the soil and the vegetation and the breaking of rocks, earthquakes and thunderstorms are regarded as the signs of his activities. His activities over a human are completed at his death and a man who has been much troubled by the Supreme Being in his life with poverty and sickness will not have the same attentions carried on into his life as an ancestor spirit.

One other important factor was constantly arising in discussions with the Basukuma on their ideas of the Supreme Being

for they referred frequently to luck (*lubango*) as being the real factor in whether man receives the best or the worst from life. Their word for luck means prosperity and a blessing as well as good luck and does not include bad luck in any sense. For them luck is prosperity and a lucky man is a prosperous one who is self-evidently favoured.

It has not quite the quality of predestination as a justification for a lack of effort but means to them that effort devoid of luck might still result in poverty, even if accompanied by a socially good life and potentially connected with the benefits deriving from the regular propitiation of ancestors. Their idea of a good life is essentially one of economic prosperity and the man without property is the lowest common factor in their social life, from which luck, or the finger of the Supreme Being, may remove him. The Basukuma have no means at all of insuring this or of even working towards it which accounts for their sense of fatalism. The Supreme Being dispenses luck but on no system of giving or withholding which they can discern.

In the final aspects of luck in either death or wealth there is little idea of a man getting his just reward; certainly propitiation of the ancestors is thought to cover a number of situations in which a man may be deprived or may receive benefits, but beyond this lies the capricious aim of luck, moved by the Supreme Being according to no system of judicial retribution or social reward.

We now pass to a consideration of the Supreme Being himself and his subordinate spirits or character aspects; in the translations of the idioms which follow a purely grammatical transcription has not been made, as it was thought best to give a translation which expressed the feeling of the idiom after discussion with several informants than to present a series of stiff phrases.

II. THE SUPREME BEING (SEBA)

This is the complete Supreme Being and there is no spirit or power above him. The name is probably derived from *kuheba* meaning to be above everything. He is regarded as being male

in essence and has no particular living place. When questioned, informants were unable to say positively whether he lives in the sky or on the earth, but in invocations, which include his name, there is an instinctive movement towards the sky.

He is in control of the other spirits both for good and for bad. For good as when a supplicant says 'I beg the Supreme Being to give the Spirit of good luck (*lyuba*) my hopes and he will give them to me, and at the same time to give me a protector to look after what I get (*nalinomba seba ang'winke lyuba, lyuba aninhe nene kikamo nangaliji anigalile*), and for death when the dying man says 'The Supreme Being has sent the Spirit of bad luck to kill me (*Seba wantumaga welelo kunizila*)', as well as for sickness in men and in cattle when the sufferer would say 'The Supreme Being has sent me sickness' (*Seba watumaga basatu kuli nene*) or 'The Supreme Being has sent sickness to kill my cattle' (*Seba lelo wanitaja ngombe yane*).

Whatever he chooses to do, the Supreme Being cannot fail (*Seba atadumbaga yaya*) and in order to do this he is alone and depends on no one else. (*Seba kuduhu sha kulenganila nasho*). The people say that he is the biggest of all things (*Seba alintale mu shoshe*) and that he is completely alone in his work (*Seba aliwiyene duhu*). He can give orders to anyone in the world (*Seba akatumaga shose sha msi*) but he is not angry every day (*Seba atapelanaga shiku jose*). When a person is off his food he might say 'The Supreme Being today has given me much bitterness' (*Lelo Seba wanipelanilagwa*) and when he gets over it that 'The Supreme Being has given me a little help' (*lelo Seba witaga kigongo*).

Although the pre-eminence of the Supreme Being is conceded both by humans and by the subordinate spirits, there are times nevertheless when he is perhaps not aware of all that is going on. The Spirit of bad-luck (*Welelo*) might cause some one to have a serious illness, unknown to the Supreme Being, from which he suddenly recovers; such a case was explained by an informant as the Basukuma, when they gave many names to their spirits, thought them to be only followers; the first is always *Seba*, even when a man is seriously ill and is unconscious

for a day before suddenly recovering; we say that the Spirit of bad luck wanted to carry him off without telling the Supreme Being but then the latter did not agree that the end of this man had yet come (*Seba walemejaga bupana wa munhu uyu butali kushika*).

This can also happen in reverse when a man suddenly dies after receiving many benefits in property and health, and it is said that this man was able to be given health by the Spirit of good luck (*lyuba*) and has had the good fortune to become wealthy, but then the Spirit of bad luck was told by the Supreme Being to carry him off even though he was given the means of leaving poverty. Here the Supreme Being has changed his mind for the Spirit of bad luck has been given the last and final order.

The magician whose powers are inherited from his ancestors who were in the same profession, requires the benevolence, or at least the indifference, of the Supreme Being for the proper practice of his art. An invocation of a magician to the Supreme Being prior to taking up his profession went as follows: 'Supreme Being, I beg you to give me the power of divination which has been offered by my ancestors. I implore you to listen to my supplications, O Spirit of good luck so that I may have strong powers and be greater than other magicians. My urge to divine is genuine and handed down by my ancestors. Now I beg the Supreme Being and you, my ancestors, to give me accurate divinations and thoughts of plant medicines so that I may both treat and cure'.

Although the Supreme Being lies beyond the normal boundaries of men's influence through invocations, it is possible, nevertheless, to anger him; for instance, a wealthy man sneering at a beggar would make him angry, not because it was an uncharitable thing to do but because it was sneering at the Supreme Being's system of dividing up property, and it would be equally unwise to speak unkindly to a sick man for the same reason. So an informant says that if you have the good fortune to get many cows, don't see a poor man and laugh at him; for there you are laughing at the Supreme Being when you curse the poor man thus; you do not know why he is poor for he was born

without luck and to swear at him is to swear at the Supreme Being for it is he that gave the poor man his poverty.

The Supreme Being would also be angry if the relatives of a man should wail excessively at his death because every man is made by him to live for a certain period, neither longer nor shorter than that and to lament is to decry his order for that person who, in the fullness of time, has had the full life allotted to him. An old man expressed it that he has created us to live alright for the length of our life; a life is to be born and to live long without dying young. You may even live to be ninety. A man who dies at that age, even though his relatives lament to the Supreme Being, has had his full time and the lamenting cannot anger him; but should the relatives lament at the death of a youth or a child, he will be very angry with them for decrying his orders and refusing to accept his wishes; there is, of course, considerable difference between this theoretical ideal and actual practice. The murder of another man will cause the Supreme Being to be angry as the murderer has taken over his work of disposing of the lives of human beings.

The word itself can also be used for master or lord of the manor when used in reference to his dependents. The origin of the word is obscure and cannot be associated with *kuseba* meaning to be warm or in a condition of ritual uncleanness. In an explanation of why such a word was chosen some elders said that the children of the first-comers to the world did not know of the existence of the Supreme Being and he was given this title to distinguish him from any kinship associations.

The Supreme Being is also known as Himself (*Ngwenekela*) either used alone or in conjunction with *Seba*, and is spoken in such phrases as the Supreme Being has no one to contradict him (*ng'wenekela Seba atinanemeja*) he is never foiled (*ng'wenekela Seba atalemelagwa*) and the Supreme Being killed him off (*ng'wenekela Seba wang'wizilaga*).

III. CONCLUSION.

Although belief in the Supreme Being and his subordinate spirits or character aspects is widespread amongst the Basukuma, it has not taken upon itself more than the faintest tinges of ritual. The main spiritual force behind the pagan Basukuma is the conception of the influence of their ancestors for good and for bad, and the belief in the Supreme Being is in practice subordinate to this, although in theory he is the controlling force behind these ancestors, for who would not rather deal with a relative known to him instead of an unknown and indifferent Supreme Being.

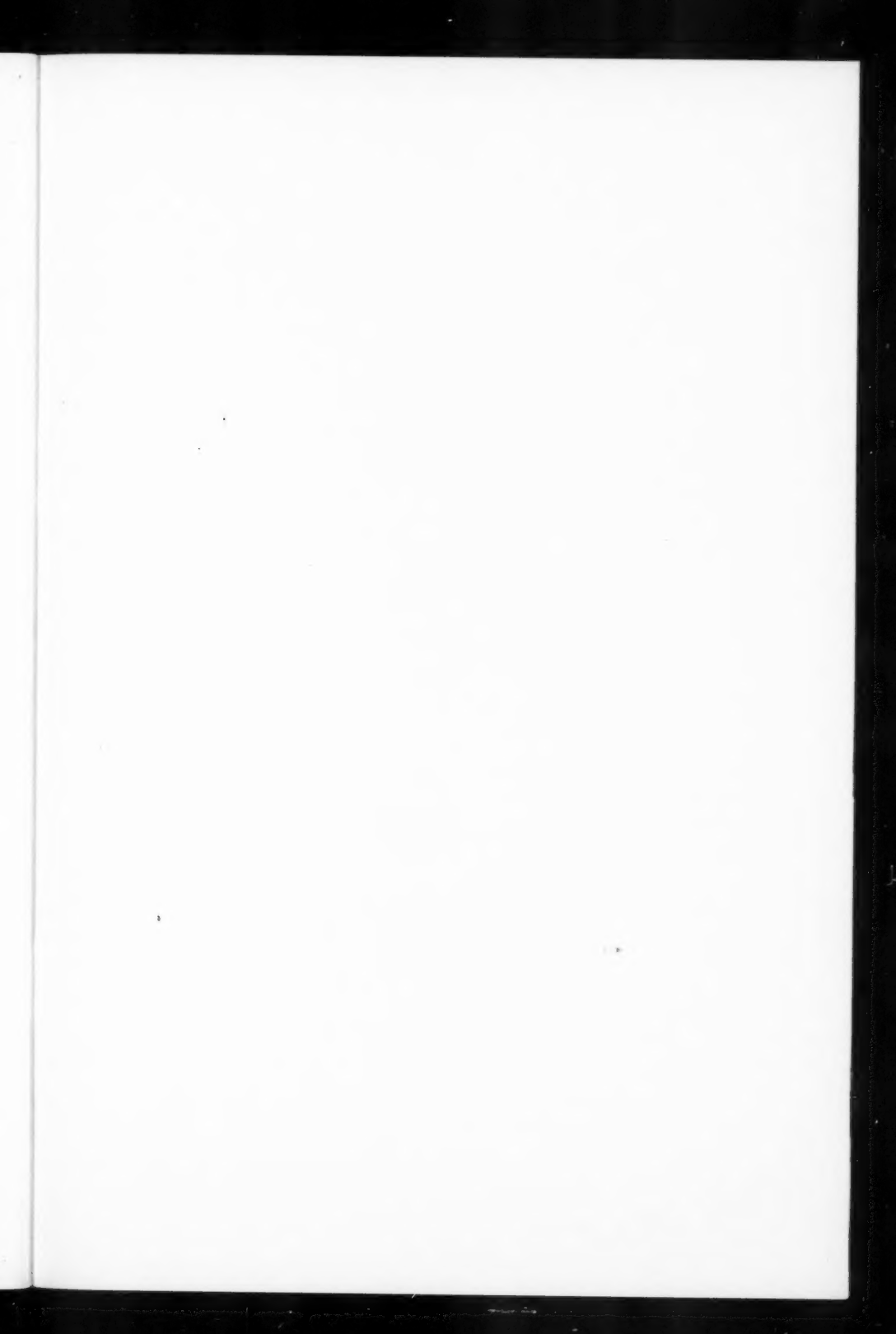
There is no doubt that the belief in the Supreme Being is not a practical force in their spiritual life and is necessary to their main beliefs and ritual activities, and if it were not so their knowledge and opinions would be considerably more stabilized instead of being extremely unsubstantial. Possibly their very lack of positive beliefs in the Supreme Being and the apparent success of their surviving system of ancestor worship, have combined to give the Basukuma a conservative outlook and to question the need for a positive theism, except as an aspect of European culture which appears to make it more desirable.

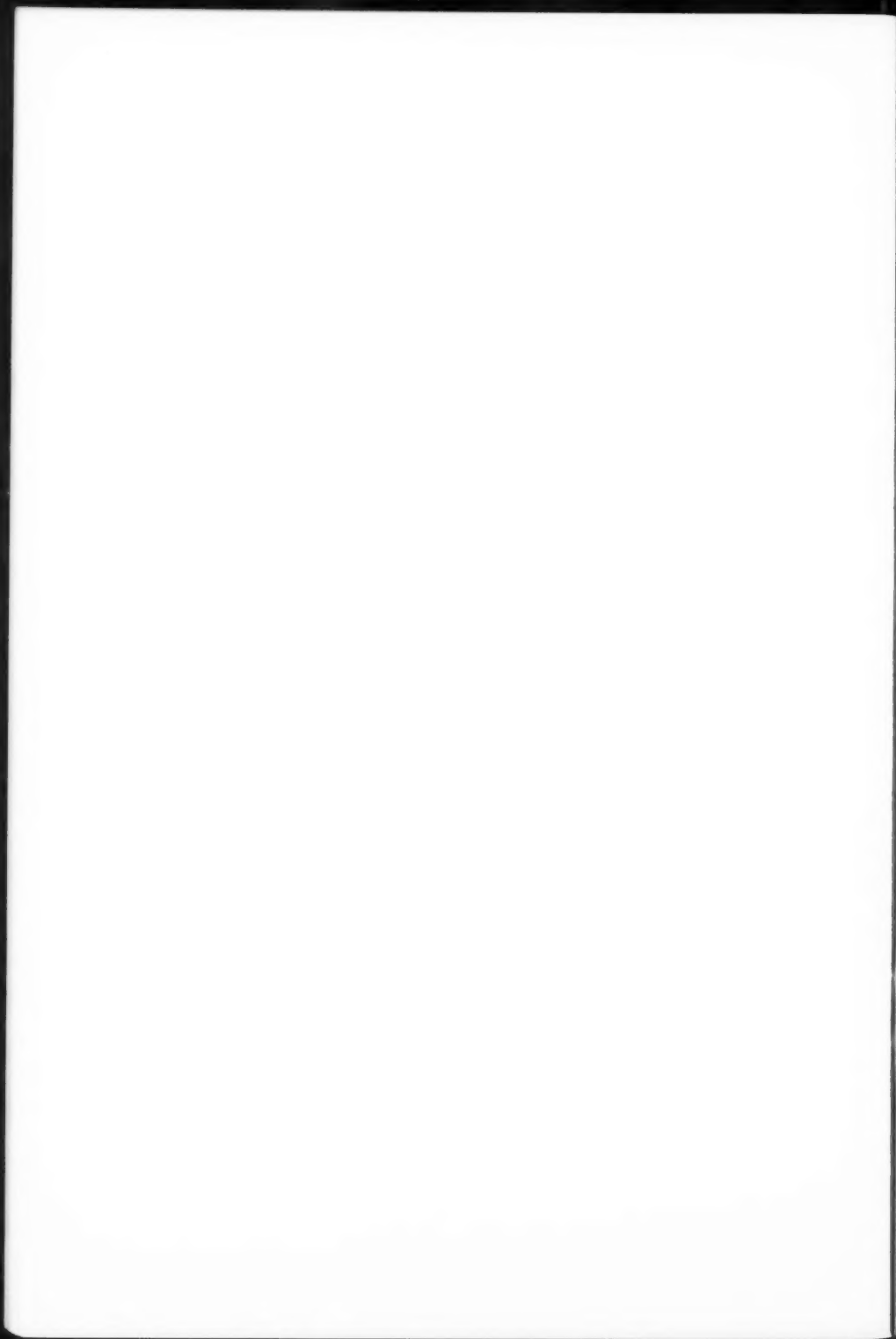
Since the belief in the Supreme Being is not strongly associated with their positive ancestor worship and thus not so liable to missionary attack and influence, there would seem to be some grounds for expecting it to survive even a considerable increase in mission activity, and although the belief may not survive in exactly its present form (or lack of form), the everyday use of phrases including his name will survive indefinitely in much the same way as 'bless you' after a sneeze has long survived its original religious significance. Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant missions working in Basukuma have utilised Kiswahili terms or transcriptions from Kiswahili terms for God and the Holy Spirit, and this has kept the belief in the Supreme Being of the Basukuma entirely separate from Christian conceptions and therefore not liable so much to transposition and conflict.

Although their attitude to the Supreme Being in both theory and practice is largely passive, it cannot be inferred that it is

in any way inadequate; their beliefs indefinite as they are, cover quite adequately their life and the stresses therein, and indeed the slow progress of Christianity amongst this people as opposed to the Bahaya, is striking proof of this; nor can it be attributed to any dullness of intellect as almost every adult Sukuma, with whom contact was made, seemed able to express his own beliefs and to argue them.

The conception of good and evil as aspects of conscience is not known to them and the Supreme Being has no influence or indeed interest in this respect, nor can it be seen that he is really a prime mover. So many of the expressions using his names are said consequent to the event and in the analysis, it is considered that the belief in the Supreme Being possibly grew up and was grafted onto the already existing ancestor worship, since the former's predominant attitude of passivity if not indifference is opposed to the latter's automatic personal interest, and might have developed as an explanation of the latter failures.





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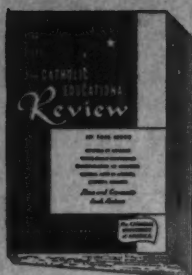
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